



# WHISPERING SMITH

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRÉ BOWLES

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## SYNOPSIS.

Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called out to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek. McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage burned. McCloud became acquainted with Dickie Dunning, a girl of the west, who came to look at the wreck. She gave him a message for Sinclair. "Whispering Smith" told President Bucks of the railroad of McCloud's brave fight against a gang of crazed miners and that was the reason for the superintendent's appointment to his high office. McCloud arranged to board at the boarding house of Mrs. Sinclair, the ex-foreman's deserted wife. Dickie Dunning was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life. Sinclair visited Marion Sinclair, who was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life. Sinclair visited Marion Sinclair, who was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life.

## CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Marion put her hand for a moment on his coat sleeve; he looked at Dickie with another laugh and spoke to her because he dared not look toward Marion. "Going back to-night, do you say? You never are?"

Dickie answered quite in earnest: "Oh, but we are. We must!"

"Why did you come, then? It's taken half the night to get here, and will take a night and a half at least to get back."

"We came to ask Mr. McCloud for some grain sacks—you know, they have nothing to work with at the ranch," said Marion; "and he said we might have some and we are to send for them in the morning."

"I see. But we may as well talk plainly," Smith looked at Dickie. "You are as brave and as game as a girl can be. I know, or you couldn't have done this. Sacks full of sand, with the boys at the ranch to handle them, would do no more good tomorrow at the bend than bladders. The river is flowing into Squaw lake above there now. A hundred men that know the game might check things yet if they're there by daylight. Nobody else, and nothing else on God's earth can."

There was silence before the fire. McCloud broke it: "I can put the 100 men there at daylight, Gordon, if Miss Dunning and her cousin want them," said McCloud.

Marion sprang to her feet. "Oh, will you do that, Mr. McCloud?"

McCloud looked at Dickie. "If they are wanted."

Dickie tried to look at the fire. "We have hardly deserved help from Mr. McCloud at the ranch," she said at last.

He put out his hand. "I must object. The first wreck I ever had on this division Miss Dunning rode 20 miles to offer help. Isn't that true? Why, I would walk 100 miles to return the offer to her. Perhaps your cousin would object," he suggested, turning to Dickie; "but no, I think we can manage that. Now what are we going to do? You two can't go back to-night, that is certain."

"We must."

"Then you will have to go in boats," said Whispering Smith.

"But the bill road?"

"There is five feet of water across it in half a dozen places. I swim my horse through, so I ought to know."

"It is all back-water, of course, Miss Dunning," explained McCloud. "Not dangerous."

"But moist," suggested Whispering Smith, "especially in the dark."

McCloud looked at Marion. "Then let's be sensible," he said. "You and Miss Dunning can have my tent."

"Is this where you stay?" asked Dickie.

"Four of us sleep in the cots, when we can, and an indefinite number lie on the ground when it rains."

"Which is your bed?"

"I usually sleep there," He pointed to the one on the right.

"I thought so. It has the blanket folded back so neatly, just as if there were sheets under it. I'll bet there aren't any."

"Do you think this is a summer resort? Knives, my assistant, sleeps there, but of course we are never both to bed at the same time; he's down

the river to-night. It's a sort of continuous performance, you know," McCloud looked at Dickie. "Take off your coat, won't you, please?"

Whispering Smith was trying to drag a chest from the foot of the cot, and Marion stood watching. "What are you trying to do?"

"Get this over to the table for a seat."

"Silly man! why don't you move the table?"

Dickie was taking off her coat. "How inviting it all is!" she smiled. "And this is where you stay?"

"When it rains," answered McCloud. "Let me have your hat, too."

"My hair is a sight, I know. We rode over rocks and up gullies into the brush—"

"And through lakes—oh, I know! I can't conceive how you ever got here at all. Your hair is all right. This is camp, anyway. But if you want a glass you can have one. Knives is a great swell; he's just from school, and has no end of things. I'll rob his bag."

"Don't disturb Mr. Knives's bag for the world!"

"But you are not taking off your hat. You seem to have something on your mind."

"Help me to get it off my mind, will you, please?"

"If you will let me."

"Tell me how to thank you for your generosity. I came all the way over here to-night to ask you for just the help you have offered, and I could not—it stuck in my throat. But that wasn't what was on my mind. Tell me what you thought when I acted so dreadfully at Marion's."

"I didn't deserve anything better after placing myself in such a fool position. Why don't you ask me what I thought the day you acted so beautifully at Crawling Stone ranch? I thought that the finest thing I ever saw."

"You were not to blame at Marion's."

"I seemed to be, which is just as bad. I am going to start the 'phones going. It's up to me to make good, you know, in about four hours with a lot of men and material. Aren't you going to take off your hat?—and your gloves are soaking wet."

A voice called the superintendent's name through the tent door. "Mr. McCloud?"

"What is it, Bill?"

"Twenty-eight and nine-tenths on the gauge, sir."

McCloud looked at his companions. "I told you so. Up three-tenths. Thank you, Bill; I'll be with you in a minute. Tell Cherry to come and take away the supper things, will you? That is about all the water we shall get to-night. I think. It's all we want," added McCloud, glancing at his watch.

"I'm going to take a look at the river. We shall be quiet now around here until half-past three, and if you, Marion, and Miss Dunning will take the tent, you can have two hours' rest before we start. Bill Dunning will guard you against intrusion, and if you want ice water ring twice."

## CHAPTER XIX.

A Talk with Whispering Smith.

When Whispering Smith had followed McCloud from the tent, Dickie turned to Marion and caught her hand. "Is this the terrible man I have heard about?" she murmured. "And I thought him ferocious! But he is as pitiless as they say, Marion?"

Marion laughed—a troubled little laugh of surprise and sadness. "Dear, he isn't pitiless at all. He has unpleasant things to do, and does them. He is the man on whom the railroad relies to repress the lawlessness that breaks out in the mountains at times and interferes with the operating of the road. It frightens people away, and prevents others from coming in to settle. Railroads want law and order. Robbery and murders don't make business for railroads. They depend on settlers for developing a country, don't you know; otherwise they would have no traffic, not to speak of wanting their trains and men let alone. When Mr. Bucks undertook to open up this country to settlers, he needed a man of patience and endurance and with courage and skill in dealing with lawless men, and no man has ever succeeded so well as this terrible man you have heard about. He is terrible, my dear, to lawless men, not to any one else. He is terrible in resource and in daring, but not in anything else I know of, and I knew him when he was a boy and wore a pink worsted scarf when he went skating."

"I should like to have seen that scarf," said Dickie, reflectively. She rose and looked around the tent. In a few minutes she made Marion lie down on one of the cots. Then she walked to the front of the tent, opened the flap, and looked out.

Whispering Smith was sitting before the fire. Rain was falling, but Dickie put on her close-fitting black coat, raised the door-flap, and walked noiselessly from the tent and up behind him. "Alone in the rain?" she asked.

She had expected to see him start at her voice, but he did not, though he rose and turned around. "Not

now," he answered as he offered her his box with a smile.

"Are you taking your hat off for me in the rain? Put it on again!" she insisted with a little tone of command, and she was conscious of gratification when he obeyed amiably.

"I won't take your box unless you can find another!" she said. "Oh, you have another! I came out to tell you what a dreadful man I thought you were, and to apologize."

"Never mind apologizing. Lots of people think worse than that of me and don't apologize. I'm sorry I have no shelter to offer you, except to sit on this side and take the rain."

"Why should you take the rain for me?"

"You are a woman."

"But a stranger to you."

"Only in a way."

Dickie gazed for a moment at the fire. "You won't think me abrupt, will you?" she said, turning to him, "but, as truly as I live, I cannot account for you, Mr. Smith. I guess at the ranch we don't know what goes on in the world. Everything I see of you contradicts everything I have heard of you."

"You haven't seen much of me yet, you know, and you may have heard much better accounts of me than I deserve. Still, it isn't surprising you can't account for me; in fact, it would be surprising if you could. Nobody pretends to do that. You must not be shocked if I can't even account for myself. Do you know what a derelict is? A ship that has been abandoned but never wholly sinks."

"Please don't make fun of me! How did you happen to come into the

humor. "That is a ridiculous accident, and it all came about when I lived in Chicago. Do you know anything about the infernal climate there? Well, in Chicago I used to lose my voice whenever I caught a cold—sometimes for weeks together. So they began calling me Whispering Smith, and I've never been able to shake the name. Odd, isn't it? But I came out to go into the real estate business. I was looking for some gold-bearing farm lands where I could raise quartz, don't you know, and such things—yes, I don't mind telling you this, though I wouldn't tell it to everybody—"

"Certainly not," assented Dickie, drawing her skirt around to sit in closer confidence.

"I wanted to get rich quick," murmured Whispering Smith, confidentially.

"Almost criminal, wasn't it?"

"I wanted to have evening clothes."

"Yes."

"And for once in my life two pairs of suspenders—a modest ambition, but a gnawing one. Would you believe it? Before I left Bucks' office he had hired me for a railroad man. When he asked me what I could do, and I admitted a little experience in handling real estate, he brought his fist down on the table and swore I should be his right-of-way man."

"How about the mining?"

Whispering Smith waved his hand in something of the proud manner in which Bucks could wave his presidential hand. "My business, Bucks said, need not interfere with that, not in the least; he said that I could do all the mining I wanted to, and I

the bag. What do you think? That man who is now president of this road had somewhere seen a highly-colored story about me in a magazine, a ten-cent magazine, you know. He had spotted me the first time I walked into his office, and told me a long time afterward it was just like seeing a man walk out of a book, and that he had hard work to keep from falling on my neck. He knew what he wanted me for; it was just this thing. I left Chicago to get away from it, and this is the result. It is not all that kind of thing, oh, no! When they want to cross a reservation I have a winter in Washington with our attorneys and dine with old friends in the White House, and the next winter I may be on snowshoes chasing a band of rustlers. I swore long ago I would do no more of it—that I couldn't and wouldn't. But it is Bucks. I can't go back on him. He is amiable and I am soft. He says he is going to have a crown and harp for me some day, but I fancy—that is, I have an intuition—that there will be a red-hot protest at the bar of heaven," he lowered his tone, "from a certain unmentionable quarter when I undertake to put the vestments on. By the way, I hear you are interested in chickens. Oh, yes, I've heard a lot about you! Bob Johnson, over at Oroville, has some pretty bantams I want to tell you about."

Whether he talked railroad or chickens, it was all one; Dickie sat spell-bound; and when he announced it was half-past three o'clock and time to rouse Marion she was amazed.

Dawn showed in the east. The men eating breakfast in tents were to be seen on a work-train up a piece of Y-track that led as near as they could be taken to where they were needed. The train had pulled out when Dickie, Marion, McCloud and Whispering Smith took horses to get across to the hills and through to the ranch-house.

## CHAPTER XX.

### At the River.

They found the ranchhouse as Marion and Dickie had left it, deserted. Puss told them every one was at the river. McCloud did not approve Dickie's plan of going down to see her cousin first. "Why not let me ride down and manage it without bringing you into it at all?" he suggested. "It can be done." And after further discussion it was so arranged.

McCloud and Smith had been joined by Dunning on horseback, and they made their way around Squaw lake and across the fields. The fog was rolling up from the willows at the bend. Men were chopping in the brush, and McCloud and his companion soon met Lance Dunning riding up the narrow strip of sand that held the river off the ranch.

McCloud greeted Dunning, regardless of his amazement, as if he had parted from him the day before. "How are you making it over here?" he asked. "We are in pretty good shape at the moment down below, and I thought I would ride over to see if we could do anything for you. This is what you call pretty fair water for this part of the valley, isn't it?"

Lance swallowed his astonishment. "This isn't water, McCloud; this is hell." He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. "Well, I call this white, anyway, and no mistake—I do, indeed, sir! This is Whispering Smith, isn't it? Glad to see you at Crawling Stone, sir." Which served not only to surprise but to please Whispering Smith.

"Some of my men were free," continued McCloud; "I switched some mattresses and sacks around the Y, thinking they might come in play here for you at the bend. They are at your service if you think you need them."

"Need them!" Lance swore fiercely and from the bottom of his heart. He was glad to get help from any quarter and made no bones about it. Moreover, McCloud lessened the embarrassment by explaining that he had a personal interest in holding the channel where it ran, lest a change above might threaten the approaches already built to the bridge; and Whispering Smith, who would have been on terms with the catfish if he had been flung into the middle of the Crawling Stone, contributed at once, like a re-enforced spring, to the ease of the situation.

Lance again took off his hat and wiped the sweat of anxiety from his dripping forehead. "Whatever differences of opinion I may have with your company, I have no lack of esteem personally, McCloud, for you, sir, by heaven! How many men did you bring?"

"And whatever wheels you Crawling Stone ranchers may have in your heads on the subject of irrigation," returned McCloud, evenly, "I have no lack of esteem personally, Mr. Dunning, for you. I brought 100."

"Do you want to take charge here? I'm frank, sir; you understand this game and I don't."

"Suppose we look the situation over; meantime, all our supplies have to be brought across from the Y. What should you think, Mr. Dunning, of put-

ting all the teams you can at that end of the work?"

"Every man that can be spared from the river shall go at it. Come over here and look at our work and judge for yourself."

They rode to where the forces assembled by Lance were throwing up embankments and riprapping. There was hurried running to and fro, a violent dragging about of willows, and a good deal of shouting.

Dunning, with some excitement, watched McCloud's face to note the effect of the activity on him, but McCloud's expression, naturally reserved, reflected nothing of his views on the subject. Dunning waved his hand at the lively scene. "They've been at it all night. How many would you take away, sir?"

"You might take them all away, as far as the river is concerned," said McCloud, after a moment.

"What? Hell! All?"

"They are not doing anything, are they, but running around in a circle? And those fellows over there might as well be making mud pies as riprapping at that point. What we need there is a mattress and sandbags—and plenty of them. Bill," directed McCloud in an even tone of business as he turned to Dunning, "see how



Dickie Ordered Horses Saddled and Rode to the River.

quick you can get your gangs over here with what sacks they can carry and walk fast. If you will put your men on horses, Mr. Dunning, they can help like everything. That bank won't last a great while the way the river is getting under it now." Dunning wheeled like an elephant on his bronco and clattered away through the mud. Lance Dunning, recovering from his surprise, started his men back to the wagons, and McCloud, dismounting, walked with him to the water's edge to plan the fight for what was left of the strip in front of the alfalfa fields.

When Whispering Smith got back to the house he was in good humor. He joined Dickie and Marion in the dining room, where they were drinking coffee. Afterward Dickie ordered horses saddled and the three rode to the river. Up and down the bank as far as they could see in the misty rain, men were moving slowly about—more men, it seemed to Dickie, than she had ever seen together in her life. The confusion and the noise had disappeared. No one appeared to hurry, but every one had something to do, and, from the gangs who with sledges were sinking "dead-men" among the trees to hold the cables of the mattress that was about to be sunk, and the Japs who were diligently preparing to float and load it, to the men that were filling and wheeling the sandbags, no one appeared excited. McCloud joined the visitors for a few moments, and then went back to where Dunning and his men on lifelines were guiding the mattress to its resting place. In spite of the gloom of the rain, which Whispering Smith said was breaking, Dickie rode back to the house in much better spirits with her two guests; and when they came from luncheon the sun, as Smith had predicted, was shining.

"Oh, come out!" cried Dickie, at the door. Marion had a letter to write and went upstairs, but Whispering Smith followed Dickie. "Does everything you say come true?" she demanded as she stood in the sunshine.

She was demure with light-heartedness and he looked at her approvingly. "I hope nothing I may say ever will come true unless it makes you happy," he answered, lightly. "It would be a shame if it did anything else."

She pointed two accusing fingers at him. "Do you know what you promised last night? You have forgotten already! You said you would tell me why my leghorns are eating their feathers off."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### Easy Money.

A high-flyer around town makes his money too easily for his own good. His rich wife gave him \$60,000 when she married him and raised it to \$300,000 to divorce him. Now he doesn't have to work or marry any more.—New York Press.



"Alone in the Rain?"

mountains? I do want to understand things better."

"Why, you are in real earnest, aren't you? But I am not making fun of you. Do you know President Bucks? No? Too bad! He's a very handsome old bachelor. And he is one of those men who get all sorts of men to do all sorts of things for them. You know, building and operating railroads in this part of the country is no joke. The mountains are filled with men that don't care for God, man, or the devil. Sometimes they furnish their own ammunition to fight with and don't bother the railroad for years; at such times the railroad leaves them alone. For my part, I never quarrel with a man that doesn't quarrel with the road. Then comes a time when they get after us, shooting our men or robbing our agents or stopping our trains. Of course we have to get busy then. A few years ago they worried Bucks till they nearly turned his hair gray. At that unfortunate time I happened into his office with a letter of introduction from his closest Chicago friend, Willis Howard, prince of good men, the man that made the Palmer house famous—yes. Now I had come out here, Miss Dunning—I almost said Miss Dickie, because I hear it so much—"

"I should be greatly set up to hear you call me Dickie. And I have wondered a thousand times about your name. Dare I ask—why do they call you Whispering Smith? You don't whisper."

He laughed with abundance of good-

humor. "That is a ridiculous accident, and it all came about when I lived in Chicago. Do you know anything about the infernal climate there? Well, in Chicago I used to lose my voice whenever I caught a cold—sometimes for weeks together. So they began calling me Whispering Smith, and I've never been able to shake the name. Odd, isn't it? But I came out to go into the real estate business. I was looking for some gold-bearing farm lands where I could raise quartz, don't you know, and such things—yes, I don't mind telling you this, though I wouldn't tell it to everybody—"

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